



KENT COUNTY SHERIFF DEPARTMENT

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Comments pertaining to House Bill 4071 to amend the Double Bunk Law

1. Although the intent of the original law was undoubtedly motivated by a desire to design a safe cell environment and prevent the chance of one inmate assaulting another, the fact of the matter is that single cells are NOT safer. While there may be a possibility of fights or assaults taking place in population cells, many more deaths by suicide or medical causes occur in single cells.
 - a. In Kent County, we have had 20 jail suicides since 1973. Of that number, 18 inmates were alone at the time of their death, and 16 of them were housed in a single cell.
 - b. We have between 50 and 60 suicide attempts in our jail every year, and 97% of those occurring outside of intake take place in a single cell.
 - c. Even if it does not result in a suicide attempt, isolation in a single cell provokes many other acts of undesirable inmate behavior, from vandalism to antisocial acting out.
2. The 8 restrictions placed on using double bunked cells by the original law inadvertently resulted in Michigan's laws or jail standards being more restrictive on this subject than 49 other states.
 - a. The 8 restrictions taken individually will sometimes be exceeded by a standard in perhaps one or two other states, but all 8 taken together and combined puts Michigan in a class by itself.
 - b. The net affect of this is not safer inmates, but wasted resources.
3. It inhibits sheriffs and jail administrators who are managing their inmate population by objective classification systems and imposes an outdated and unsuccessful containment model.
 - a. A proper classification system approved by the MDOC, as provided for in HB 4071, would do much more to prevent the comingling of violent and nonviolent inmates than what the restrictions of the present law accomplish.
 - b. Separation by charge, felony vs misdemeanor, or sentenced vs presentenced does little or nothing to protect a vulnerable inmate from a predator in jail for a minor charge.
4. Adopting HB 4071 would have positive financial implications for counties and jails.
 - a. It is more expensive to build a new jail cell for two inmates to Michigan's standard than to build a cell to American Correctional Association standards.
 - b. HB 4071 would permit operational flexibility and the end result would be fewer empty jail beds and wasted resources.
5. The proposed HB 4071 is a good, solid bill and only one slight change is needed – remove the word “unrestricted” in the first sentence in section 62b(1)(a).